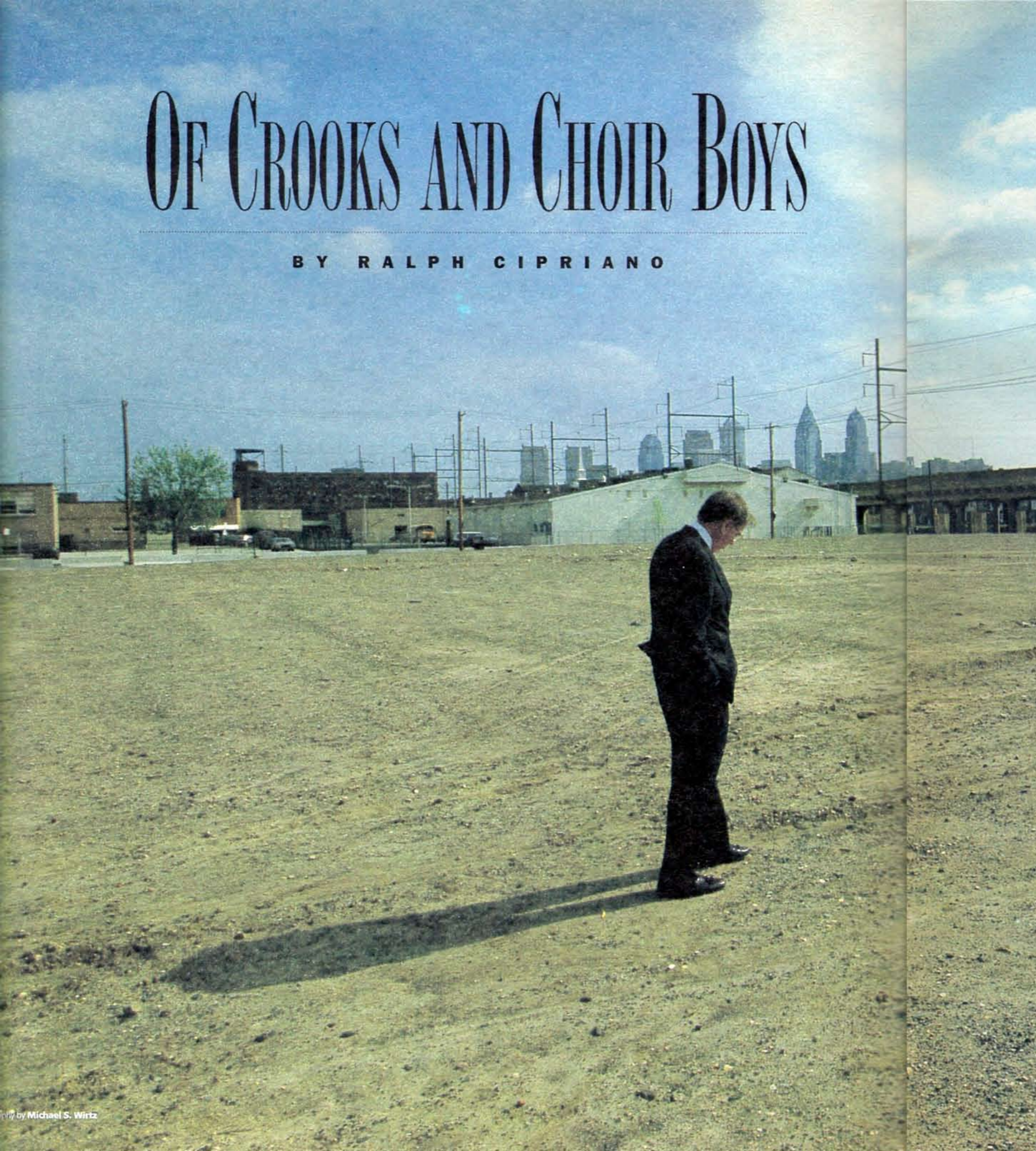


OF CROOKS AND CHOIR BOYS

BY RALPH CIPRIANO



Bennett Levin's crash course in city politics

Bennett Levin was working late at the office. He had the lights down, shades drawn, and he was listening to the soundtrack from *The Godfather*.

It was Nov. 1, 1995, the week before "America's mayor" was up for reelection. And on the 11th floor of the Municipal Services Building, across from City Hall, the onetime star of the Rendell cabinet was dictating a secret memo.

"PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL. CITY OF PHILADELPHIA MEMORANDUM.

"To: David L. Cohen, Chief of Staff.

"From: Bennett Levin, P.E., Commissioner, Department of Licenses and Inspections.

"I must report to you the contents of a very unsettling conversation which I had with [Inspector General] Ben Redmond. The conversation was so disturbing that I really did not sleep much last night."

In what would be his last days in office, Levin had become consumed with an investigation involving some of his top officials. He feared a whitewash.

So the Commish wrote more than 80 memos, after hours and on the weekends, to "document the insanity of the place" — clandestine meetings, conflicts of interest, and cover-ups.

"Real Nixonian" stuff, Levin said. "I ought to know, I'm a Republican."

Levin's secretary typed to the strains of harpsichord music. It was Levin's favorite *Godfather* tune from the baptism scene, where Michael Corleone sits in church while his henchmen gun down his enemies.

In between memos, the 6-foot-2 Commish with the booming voice would amuse aides with a bad Brando imitation: "Rudy, Rudy my son," the commissioner would rasp. "You have sinned and there is nothing we can do to help you now. So go pray, Rudy, go save your soul, Rudy. For tomorrow, you will sleep with the fishes, Rudy. Now, leave me alone. I gotta write this memo."

The legend of Bennett Levin goes something like this: Successful mechanical and electrical engineer leaves \$2 million-a-year business at age 52 to help turn city government around. Guy who can't be bought takes over department where

people get indicted for taking \$50 bills.

Levin reforms department, eliminates fixes and favoritism. He has his guys out hustling. They do twice as many inspections. Fees roll in as never before. Levin is best L&I commissioner ever.

Then a Levin lieutenant, Frank Antico, gets in trouble for pushing a go-go bar that his son has an ownership interest in. Levin defends Antico (maybe to protect his own image as a reformer) and, in the process, goes bonkers. He has to be taken out.

Ask Vince Fumo, the guy who recommended Levin — a Jersey City native raised in Philadelphia — for the job.

"There are so few people in government who get stuff done," the state senator said. "They stick out like diamonds. . . . Bennett was in there." Then, "he kinda snapped out."

What's so convenient about the story is this: Ed and Vince and their pals get to claim credit for everything Levin did right. And they don't get any blood on their suits when they dump the body.

Levin's version is: He's the last honest man in city government, who chose to jump out the window rather than compromise. He tells his side of the story gleefully, with rants against his enemies and forgiveness for his friends.

Levin's friends say a guy like Levin is hard to understand in a place like City Hall, where people sell each other five times a day. He had his own money, and he wasn't looking to be appointed to higher office. In the Antico case, they say, he simply wanted Antico to get his day in court. Instead, Levin says, the mayor officiated at a frontier lynching and wanted Levin to hold the horse steady.

Rather than roll over, Levin started a memo-writing campaign that drove *his bosses* crazy and burned every bridge he'd built with his successes. In just two months, he went from having unlimited access to the mayor to not being able to get phone calls returned. Levin says his bosses strung him along until the election. Then they hit *eject*.

continued on next page

RALPH CIPRIANO is an Inquirer staff writer.

Levin at 25th and Reed, where as L&I commissioner he knocked down a block-long abandoned clothing factory

Bennett Levin's relationship with Ed Rendell began with a train ride. Back in November 1991, Levin, a campaign contributor, offered the candidate use of his private railroad car.

Levin had lovingly restored a luxurious 1928 Pennsylvania Railroad car that had played host to Winston Churchill, Evita Peron, and three presidents. Rendell borrowed the car for an old-fashioned whistle-stop campaign tour.

Rendell won the election, and at the suggestion of Vince Fumo, the mayor's transition team asked Levin if he was interested in working at L&I. An engineer would be good at the city agency that enforces building codes, business regulations and zoning ordinances.

They offered Levin the number-two job under Rex Parker, a retired postal manager and disciple of state Sen. Hardy Williams. But Levin said they told him he would really run the department.

Levin declined, "in view of the circumstances surrounding the offer."

"While I appreciate your concern for racial balance, I also believe in excellence, equal opportunity for all people, and the need for this city, especially in its present condition, to attract and motivate people who are committed to bringing a 'passion' to government," Levin wrote. The department "sorely needs new energy, and new leadership which is also professionally competent."

Rendell named Levin L&I commissioner, and Parker his deputy. Parker, who left office in 1994, says Levin "could not stand people having a differing opinion than him."

When the mayor took office, he brought an army of volunteers into City Hall with mops, buckets and Lysol. He sent Bennett Levin over to clean up L&I.

Levin descended into the bowels of the department — where people stood in endless lines waiting for building permits — and he eliminated a historical courtesy that allowed lawyers to go to the head of the line.

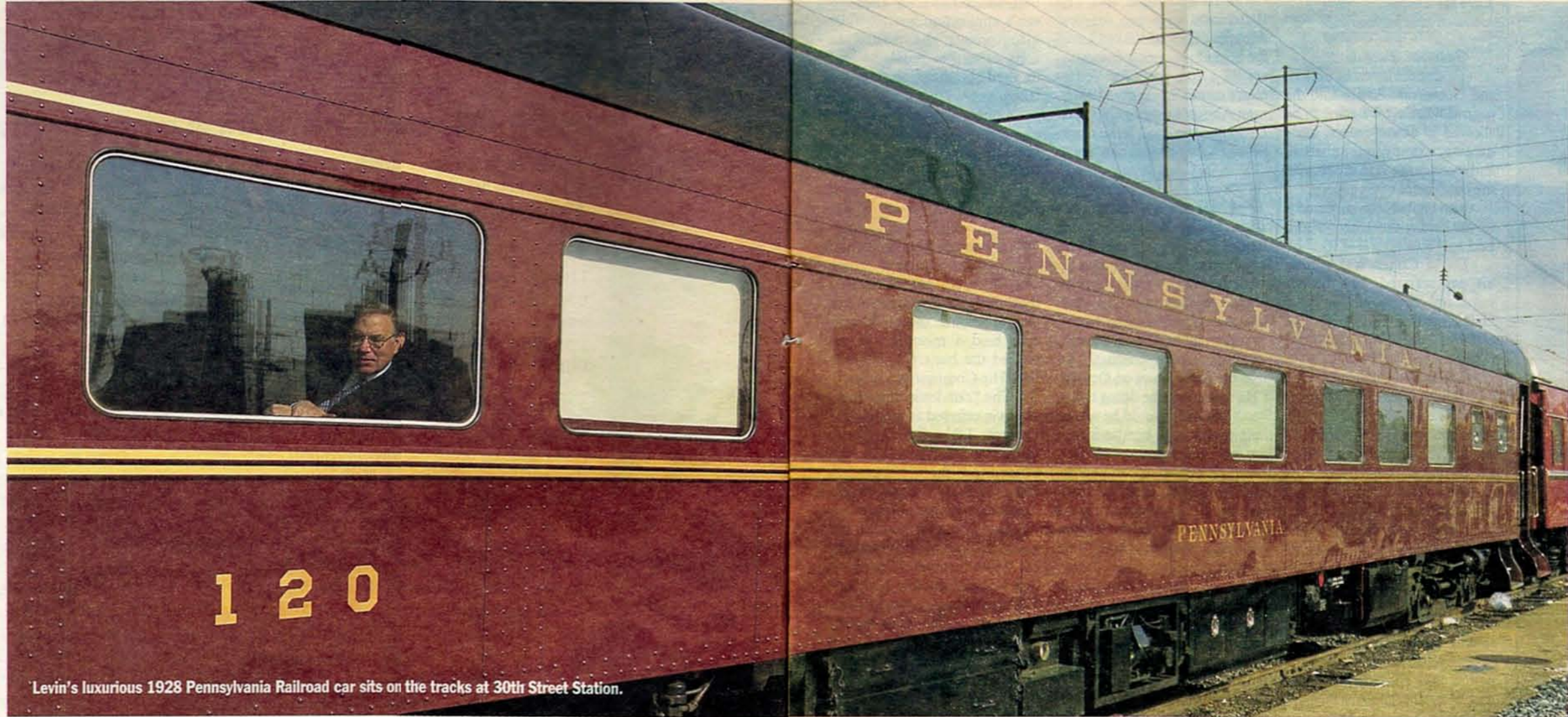
As an engineer, Levin had stood in those lines himself, stewing over such favoritism. So as commissioner he decreed that anybody who wanted an accelerated permit would have to pay for it. They'd shell out a minimum of \$500 to have city employees process paperwork on overtime.

Rendell loved Levin's act. He called Levin "The Hawk."

"The Hawk" was out in his GMC Jimmy, packing an Olympus, on the lookout for code violations. His employees followed suit. Levin's inspectors busted contractors at the Spectrum for building superboxes without permits. They nailed roofers who tarred city schools but forgot to stop by L&I first. Nobody was safe. Levin even had building inspectors posted in the parking lot at Home Depot, waiting to tail customers with large loads of lumber.

It all paid off at the cash register. Under Levin, annual revenues rose in four years from \$17 million to \$28 million.

Levin also became a hero in the neighborhoods, for knocking down about 5,000 former crackhouses and abandoned buildings. His biggest score was a block-



Levin's luxurious 1928 Pennsylvania Railroad car sits on the tracks at 30th Street Station.

long former clothing factory at 25th and Reed. Levin spent \$1.2 million to have it leveled.

Bennett Levin was a 24-hour-a-day commissioner. He'd go at night to community meetings, then roll out of bed at 4 in the morning when a building collapsed. Back in the office, The Commish wrote sarcastic memos, read them aloud, and laughed like hell at his own jokes.

"I was an outsider, I was the Trojan horse of government," Levin said. "My weapon was my pen."

When the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science failed to pay rental property licenses for school dormitories, Levin sent James P. Gallagher, college president, a copy of a poster he planned to hang all over campus.

"ATTENTION: STUDENTS. NEED TO PAY RENT ABSOLVED. The Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science has failed to secure the required residential rental license. Therefore you are absolved from paying any rents until your school has secured the proper license. You cannot be evicted during this period of noncompliance."

College officials forked over \$41,000.

When Levin sat through too many "show-and-tell" meetings at City Hall, featuring bureaucrats and overhead projectors, he sent a memo to Cohen, complaining, "Not only do they give you a comic book, but they read it to you."

Frank Antico, a street-smart South Philly guy, was on a first-name basis with every ward leader, tavern owner and topless dancer.

"He was a Damon Runyan character," Levin said. "You've heard of Nathan Detroit? This is the original Philly Frank. In the land of the blind, where the one-eyed man is king, even the guy with blurred vision can get something done."

Antico was one of the most knowledgeable people in city government, Levin will tell you. "He knew more about zoning than anybody. He knew more about the law and how it pertained to the department than the lawyers in the law department. And . . . he was willing to go out at 2 in the morning even though he wasn't getting paid [overtime] and bust nuisance bars, topless joints, stop-and-go joints."

Antico also was civil service. He tested No. 1 for his job, chief of L&I's business regulatory enforcement unit, and was responsible for regulating thousands of city businesses.

Everybody knew Frank. He was probably one of the most investigated officials in city government. But what can you expect from a guy who hangs around L&I for 38 years? Or as Levin once wrote Cohen, "I hope you do not believe that, when I became Commissioner, the renegades, crooks and petty criminals were suddenly transformed into choir boys."

The FBI had arrested Antico in 1974 on allega-

tions that he had extorted \$1,000 from the owner of an auto shop seeking a variance. The city fired Antico the following year, but the charges were dismissed because of insufficient evidence. Antico won his job back in 1976.

When Levin took over the department, he learned of Antico's longtime relationship with Elizabeth Ricciardi. Ricciardi, who worked as an expeditor, had two young children with Antico, who is married. She sought zoning permits for clients from an L&I unit supervised by Antico.

"I wasn't born yesterday," said Levin, so, he said, he turned the matter over in 1992 to Benjamin Redmond, the city's inspector general. But he said he never got a reply. He thought the case was dead until he found out differently last year. Meanwhile, Levin said, he yanked Antico's authority over the zoning permit unit.

Then in early 1995, Levin said, Antico told him that his son Frank Jr. and a business partner were planning to buy Cheerleaders, a go-go bar at Front and Oregon that was closed at the time. The new owners wanted to reopen as an adult cabaret. (Among the new owners, Antico eventually disclosed, were his wife and his two elementary school-age children with Ricciardi.) Under the zoning ordinance, dancers in go-go bars have to wear the equivalent of bathing suits, while cabaret dancers can wear pasties and g-strings.

Levin said he told Antico to go to the Zoning Board of Adjustment, apply for a cabaret permit and disclose his son's interest. And if Frank Jr. got the permit, there would have to be some changes, Levin said: Antico might have to relinquish his strip-joint duties.

The zoning board held an Aug. 30 hearing on Cheerleaders. No one showed up to oppose it, though the Whitman Community Council did send a letter of opposition. The city Commerce Department and Planning Commission were in favor of Cheerleaders. A business partner disclosed Frank Jr.'s interest. No vote was taken.

Yet on Sept. 27, the board voted 5-0 against Cheerleaders. Levin's representative on the panel, deputy L&I commissioner Mary-Rita D'Alessandro, abstained.

Antico wondered if the Whitman Council, a neighborhood group from the Whitman Park area of South Philadelphia, would reconsider. The future owners of Cheerleaders were willing to part with some cash. Maybe a deal could be worked out.

The zoning board vote seemed strange to Levin; with only one group opposing Cheerleaders, he had thought it would sail through.

Compare that with the Emerald Club. The zoning board, chaired by Thomas J. Kelly, had approved the topless cabaret at 12th and Race in 1993 over the ob-

jections of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp., the Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority, the Reading Terminal Market Preservation Fund, the city Planning Commission, the Chinese Gospel Church, Councilman Joseph Vignola, and several neighboring businesses.

"Somehow, this smacks of a personal vendetta," Levin wrote Rendell on Sept. 29. "Surely if Tom has a problem with Frank, it should not be exercised against Frank's grown son." Levin, after all, had two grown sons of his own.

To Tom Kelly, it was a matter of location. "I voted for that [Emerald Club] because it was near the Convention Center. I thought it may be something useful near the convention center. Somebody goes to a convention, they look for the kind of place that that place is." As far as Cheerleaders, "there's a Toys R Us right next to it," Kelly said. "That's crazy."

Levin thought there was more at issue than Kelly was admitting. Kelly is also president and business manager of the Sheet Metal Workers International Association, Local Union 19. And Kelly, Levin wrote the mayor, had used his government job to question if zoning board applicants were using union labor.

Kelly said he doesn't do that anymore.

Kelly voted against a 1994 application for the Carousel Lounge on South Delaware Avenue, while his union was picketing the place. The owners, who were renovating, complained to the police about threats from sheet metal union officials, and police ordered periodic checks of the job site. When the Carousel's lawyer complained about the board's denial of the variance, accusing Kelly of a conflict of interest, the zoning board voted again. This time Kelly abstained, and the Carousel got its variance.

All this Levin wrote in two memos to Rendell. Immersed in the details, Levin couldn't see the big picture. He'd busted people outside City Hall. Now his targets were inside City Hall. What was the difference?

Levin's memos went unanswered.

"Hey, Frank," a politician whispered in Antico's ear. "The press is here."

"So what?"

Antico said he had nothing to hide. And, hey, he knew the subject matter of the night better than anybody in city government.

Antico had asked to speak to the Whitman Council, and he was invited to the Oct. 11 meeting at the Methodist Nursing Home. Whitman Council meetings are normally small affairs, but there was quite a crowd on this night. A Vince Fumo aide showed up, along with a local police captain and a City Council member, all to testify on Antico's behalf.

Antico told the crowd he was there for two reasons: to answer their questions about go-go bars and adult cabarets, and to assure the crowd that Frank Jr. would not be getting any "special treatment." Since it was his kid's place, he said, it would have to be "clean as a whistle."

Antico then launched proudly into the city's zoning ordinance, which he had written. Some grandmothers on the Whitman Council looked startled as he described how cabaret dancers are allowed to show off "breasts below a point immediately above the top of the areola," as well as "male genitals in a discernibly turgid state."

continued on next page

Levin

continued from previous page

Genitals? Turgid?

To dispel visions of Sodom and Gomorrah, Antico told the council what *wasn't* going to be allowed in Cheerleaders: nude dancing, sodomy, masturbation, and intercourse. He spoke with the confidence of an expert.

The Daily News summed it up on Friday the 13th: "From L&I to T&A."

David Cohen was getting his car serviced. His beeper went off. Somebody at City Hall read him the story. The election was less than four weeks away.

Cohen dialed Levin.

"He was very matter-of-fact," Levin said. "He says, 'You gotta get rid of Antico.'"

"I did not order him to get rid of Antico," Cohen said. "At no point did I order him to get rid of Antico."

Cohen said the two men discussed relieving Antico of his responsibilities regulating strip joints. Cohen said he also told Levin the inspector general would handle this case. The inspector general already had an investigation from three years before into Antico, the probe that Levin thought was dead.

Later, Levin said, "If you can't catch Frank Antico in 15 minutes, you must be a flat-foot."

Levin was smoldering over the moral crusade against Antico. He called Cohen back. "You're so worried about Antico. Why don't you worry about what Vederman and Beitchman were doing last night with three topless girls that Antico got for them?"

Herb Vederman and Ted Beitchman were two mayoral deputies. They had asked Levin for help in procuring entertainers for a stag party for Vederman's cousin. Levin gave Beitchman Antico's number. At least Levin had the good sense to say no when they invited him along.

Frunk Antico was now the star of a dull election between Rendell and Joe Rocks. The camera crews and newspaper reporters turned up at all the mayor's public appearances. All they wanted to talk about was Frank Antico.

Rendell had heard enough.

"It's a clear conflict," he told the Daily News on Oct. 14. "He should not be doing this."

"Not only should he not be helping his son, but he is also the enforcer against people who could be viewed as competitors of his son, or potential competitors, and it's inappropriate. I think it presents really not just a potential conflict, but a real conflict."

Antico was swinging from the rafters. Rendell said he had turned the matter over to the inspector general and was expecting a report back in two days.

Levin read the papers, then dialed City Hall. He was fuming.

"Look, you can't use your position to assassinate somebody's character if you don't have the facts," Levin said he lectured his boss. "He [Rendell] starts to give me the tap dance: I know more about this than you do."

But Levin said he persisted: "You can't trash somebody unless there's a finding." That would prejudice the whole process. He wrote Cohen a memo Oct. 16, saying he was concerned "on how any report by the Inspector General would not be warped to justify the now publicly expressed opinion of the mayor."

Rendell says he made the right call at the right time.

"Did you think you need a grand jury investigation to decide that what Frank Antico did was wrong?" the mayor asks. "Any reasonable person would have to come to the conclusion

that his conduct vis a vis his son's application was woefully inappropriate and created all sorts of ethical problems and merited the discipline that was taken."

Cohen says, "Everybody else seems to understand what the issue was." All 1.5 million Philadelphians got the point — "with the possible exception of Bennett Levin."

Levin was finding that not everybody liked Frank Antico. He discovered that, prior to the Cheerleaders zoning hearing, three L&I officials held a meeting and reviewed the bar's file. Nobody told The Commish about it. The "clandestine meeting," as Levin referred to it, included Deputy L&I Commissioner D'Alessandro, who had abstained on the Cheerleaders vote, and Rudy Paliaga, the department's integrity officer.

Levin was convinced the group had plotted to sink Antico. When he asked D'Alessandro, he said, she told him conflicting stories. She was a "bold-faced liar," Levin wrote Cohen Nov. 6. He ordered her to stop going to zoning board meetings.

And he was angry with Paliaga, a 30-year L&I veteran. Paliaga was "probably the most widely despised employee in this department," Levin wrote Cohen.

Paliaga had a history of troubles. He'd been relieved of his duties in 1988, after a grand jury investigation cited "systematic mismanagement" by L&I officials as leading to six major fires. The fires had caused \$23 million in property damage and claimed two lives. After a month, Paliaga was reinstated.

When Levin went through Paliaga's personnel files, Levin wrote Cohen, he found they had been "sufficiently manicured so that no mention of this incident or any other negative comment existed."

Paliaga also had given L&I documents pertaining to Antico to the inspector general, without telling Levin. Paliaga said he was only following the inspector general's instructions. Paliaga also gave L&I documents to the FBI for an ongoing

ing federal grand jury investigation of L&I and Antico.

"I have been loyal to you from your first day in office until even today," Paliaga wrote Levin. "I feel hurt that you would question my ethics. . . . The reputation that I have as a man of integrity means everything to me."

Nevertheless, Paliaga now had a problem. All of a sudden, information potentially damaging to him, dating back to 1979, started turning up regularly on Levin's desk. Levin told the inspector general he had no idea where the stuff was coming from. But the inspector general believed somebody at L&I had put out an order to "get dirt" on Paliaga.

One of the most serious allegations contended that Paliaga had run a renegade operation in L&I, where he "priority processed" applications for politically connected people, such as City Commissioner Margaret Tartaglione and former Abscam star Ozzie Myers.

"There is no such official or unofficial procedure in this department known as priority processing," Levin wrote Cohen. This was a violation of Levin's golden rule of no political favors in his department. Paliaga said he had done nothing without the knowledge of L&I higher-ups.

Undaunted, Levin sent about a dozen of those priority permits to Cohen. The same permits also were leaked to The Inquirer, which ran a story about Levin relieving Paliaga of his duties.

The day the article was published, two officials from the inspector general's office questioned Tom McNally, L&I's public relations official, for 90 minutes. They wanted to know if Levin had used McNally and the newspaper to make a public hit on a cooperating witness — namely Paliaga. The officials also wanted to know how the newspaper got the story.

Levin was writing up to six memos a day.

He wanted to talk to the mayor: "I went to David (Cohen), I went to Vince (Fumo), and Herb (Vederman)

and I said, I would like to talk to the mayor, and they all told me the mayor didn't want to talk to me, because the mayor doesn't want to deal with unpleasant things.

"What is he, the mayor just to kiss babies and eat hoagies?"

Cohen said Levin never went through him to talk to the mayor. All he had to do was pick up the phone.

Fumo agreed that Rendell was ducking Levin. "Eddie doesn't like confrontations. He's not good at that."

On Oct. 19, Levin and Cohen had lunch at the Marathon Grill at 16th and JFK Boulevard. Levin ate a kosher hot dog. Cohen ate a salad. They talked about restructuring the department. Levin threatened to quit if D'Alessandro wasn't fired. Cohen suggested it was time for Antico to retire.

And if he did, according to Levin, the city was ready to make a deal.

"David told me we can work out the zoning and make the inspector general's investigation come out any way we want," Levin said, meaning, he believed, Antico could be cleared.

Levin said he walked back to City Hall, flabbergasted, and immediately told two colleagues what Cohen had told him. Later, both would confirm that Levin had told them of the encounter, though neither wanted to be identified.

"Absolutely not," Cohen said, "there was no discussion of this."

Cohen said he asked Levin why he was protecting Antico.

"Why are you hanging on to this guy? Why are you protecting him?" Cohen recalls asking Levin. "Don't you know he's going to take you down with him?"

Levin went to Cohen's office for a meeting with Inspector General Redmond. More news: Redmond, Levin said, wanted Antico's wide-ranging duties as business regulatory officer to be turned over to Paliaga. Levin said he was incensed — the inspector general should be a neutral party; instead of investigating Paliaga, he was acting as his

continued on Page 17

OVER 160 EXHIBITORS &
7,000 TEDDY BEARS
FOR SALE

June 8
Holiday Inn
Lincoln Hwy E/Rt.30
Lancaster, PA
9:00am-4:30pm
ADM: \$3
under 12 free
CALL FOR FREE BRO.:

bear by Anne Cranthow

Levin

continued from Page 13

agent.

"The inspector general was very defensive as to Rudy and stated that we should not focus on Rudy right now, because if we had to focus on Rudy, he [Redmond] would have to remove himself from the investigatory process," Levin wrote Cohen in a memo.

"We were trying to figure out how L&I would run" without Antico, Cohen said. Giving Antico's duties to Paliaga seemed like "a good interim solution."

"It just made good organizational sense that Rudy should assume those responsibilities," agreed Redmond. "And I had a lot of trust in Rudy's credibility and his personal integrity."

At the end of a long day, Levin went home to his condo overlooking the Schuylkill. It was after midnight, but it wasn't over yet. The phone rang. Vince Fumo wanted to see him.

Bennett Levin had made lots of people at City Hall mad. And Levin was threatening to jump ship. Right before the election! It was time for Political Science 101, with Professor Fumo.

Levin reported to Fumo's South Philly rowhouse at 8 a.m. He took a seat on Fumo's living room couch. The senator was looking grim. Levin couldn't quit before an election; he had to stay on for the good of the team.

Bennett, Fumo told him, you are not too skilled in the political side of life. You're a better engineer than I am, but I'm probably a better politician than you are.

You're big on loyalty, I'm big on loyalty. I understand loyalty, but by defending Antico, you're leading

with your heart. This is a kamikaze mission. I know, I've been on a few of them myself. . . .

You've got to understand the political dynamic of when something gets into the media. The whole dynamic changes. I don't think what Antico did was that horrendous, it just was stupid. . . . Antico is already done. By continuing to defend him, you are stretching the story out in the press, and hurting your own credibility.

"Bennett, just get out of town for a while," Fumo said. He offered Levin the use of his Florida condo.

"I've got my own place in Florida," Levin said. The two men laughed.

"Senator, solely out of respect for you, I'm not going to do anything precipitous," Levin said. He agreed to stay on until after the election. They shook hands.

As Levin left, Fumo gave him one parting lesson. Levin was preoccupied with getting rid of D'Alessandro, so, Fumo tried to tell him, when you want to nail somebody, you don't send memos.

"Faccia Contenta," he said. It's Italian American dialect, which, loosely translated, means: Make a happy face. Then when they're not looking, stick a knife in their back.

America's mayor" won re-election, with 77 percent of the vote. Two weeks later, Levin resigned effective Dec. 8, citing "a lack of support" from the mayor's office.

Dan Geringer of The Daily News had a hot tip and broke the "Boobgate" scandal — "Ed's aides star in topless fling" — on Dec. 6. The next day, Levin went to Washington to collect Governing Magazine's award as one of nine "Public Officials of the Year." To Levin

and Antico, who were quoted in Geringer's column, the timing was an amazing coincidence. To others, it was another leak.

In Washington, Levin thanked the mayor for giving him the opportunity to serve, and for encouraging him to be a risk-taker. And the next day, he said, he sat around his office, for the last time, greeting well-wishers until 6 p.m. and wondering why Ed never called.

On Dec. 29, the mayor's office announced the inspector general's findings. New L&I Commissioner Robert Barnett said he would start disciplinary proceedings against Antico for violating the city's ethics code. Antico retired and became a zoning consultant.

Barnett announced that, after an "exhaustive analysis," Paliaga had been cleared of all allegations and restored as the department's integrity officer. He also said that Paliaga and D'Alessandro did nothing improper regarding the alleged clandestine meeting prior to the zoning hearing on Cheerleaders. Barnett put D'Alessandro back on the zoning board. D'Alessandro felt vindicated: "The bottom line is: Levin's gone, Antico's gone, and I'm still here."

Sadly for The Commish, it didn't turn out like his *Godfather* fantasy: The hitmen fired blanks, the Bad Guys got away.

The last time Levin saw Antico was back in March at Antico's retirement party. Antico was all decked out for the night, according to a guest, in his "John Gotti finest."

New L&I Commissioner Barnett boycotted the party, so it fell to Levin to read the plaque from the city.

continued on Page 27

Levin

continued from Page 17

"In grateful appreciation for 38 years of dedicated service to the citizens of Philadelphia," Levin said, barely holding back a laugh. "Please accept our thanks and gratitude for the excellence and pride you have brought to your work. May you enjoy the pleasant years that lie ahead.

"Edward G. Rendell, Mayor."

Cheerleaders reopened for business without a cabaret permit. The city couldn't withdraw its previous go-go license, so Summer and Jasmine and A.J. dance under black lights in thongs and bikini tops, which they occasionally lift for the customers.

Antico hangs out at his son's club these days. He said he has no regrets. He drives a brand-new Lincoln Town Car. Frank Jr. drives a Cadillac.

"I love going to the bank every day," Antico said.

The Whitman neighborhood association folks are sorry that all the publicity made Cheerleaders withdraw its offer of a \$14,000 contribution. The cash was part of a proposed deal to get the group to withdraw its objections to a cabaret license.

"It would have been nice to have the money," association president Robert Blackburn said. "We never got that opportunity. We got a go-go bar, and that's all she wrote."

As for Bennett Levin, everybody agrees he displayed a rare gift for public service. He reformed L&I, made the city all that money, knocked down all those buildings. But don't ex-

pect him back anytime soon.

"I think he's done in government," Fumo said. "I don't see how he's going to outlive what happened afterwards."

Because he broke the code: "You don't rat people out," Fumo said. "Things hit the media that only Bennett could have leaked. I watched Buddy Cianfrani go to jail for five years and never say a word about deals he had done.

"It's a shame [about Levin] because he's got a helluva talent. I still like him, he's my friend, and I would do anything for him.

"I was sorry to see him leave, but it had gotten so bizarre, it was like a relief."

Rendell says Levin was the best L&I commissioner ever. In reforming a corrupt and lazy bureaucracy, "Bennett did miracles, but he did it at a high personal toll. He got suspicious of everyone."

Rendell compared Levin to a "great horse that gave everything he had and gave out a little before the finish."

These days, Levin has lots of time and few regrets.

On a recent sunny day, Levin stood on the back of his magnificent, 80-foot-long Tuscan-red railroad car with the four bedrooms, walnut paneling, and velvet couches. Levin waved at a passing train. "I feel good about the entire experience, even the ending. Because I don't have anything to be ashamed of."

Levin's car was the last on the 7:05 Amtrak to New York. "This is how we leave town," Levin said, tugging on his train whistle. "You give it a little toot." ■